



## ISLAND COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DIVISION

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RE: Request to Change the Speed Limit on Island County Road

When changing the speed limit, we are in effect changing a law. To this end, the process is not taken lightly and can be quite a lengthy one, often taking a year or more. The main factor in determining the speed limit is what speed the majority of the public is traveling. This is referred to as the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed. The speed limit usually reflects this number (see more below).

If a group or individual wishes to pursue a speed limit change, they fill out a petition (example attached). This petition should include the location where they wish for the speed change to take place, the proposed speed limit, and signatures of the adjacent property owners on this segment of the road. At this time, these property owners can express their view of the petition. Completed petitions are mailed to the Board of County Commissioners and then referred to the Traffic Engineer for review and comments.

The Traffic Engineer will review the petition and the road in question. Our goal in Island County is to set our speed limits at a speed that is safe and efficient, meaning a speed that is safe for the general public and still moves traffic efficiently. We rely on national engineering standards to determine what the safe and efficient speed is. Island County follows the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)* in establishing speed zones. The main factor in determining the speed limit is the speed at which the majority of the motorists are traveling. Speed studies are used to measure the actual speeds of vehicles traveling on the section of road in question. The data collected is evaluated, and the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed is determined. The standard assumes that 85 percent of the drivers on the road are traveling at a reasonable and prudent speed. Speed limits are generally based on this 85<sup>th</sup> percentile because it conforms to the drivers' perception of the safe speed. An article from the Institute of Transportation Engineers which has more information on speed zoning is attached.

The Traffic Engineer evaluates all available information to determine if a change in the speed limit is warranted. If it is determined that a speed limit modification is necessary, a resolution is prepared which puts into legal terms the exact location where the speed zone would apply and the revised speed limit. This resolution is then presented to the Island County Commissioners for a public hearing. At this hearing, the general public has the opportunity to agree or disagree with the proposed speed limit change. The resolution then goes before the Board of Island County Commissioners for a vote. After approval, speed limit signs reflecting the new speed zone are posted.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the Traffic Engineer at (360) 678-7953.